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Cross Cultural Differences in Managers' Support for Home-based Telework A Theoretical Elaboration

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ABSTRACT Home-based telework is one of the arrangements organizations can introduce to facilitate a better balance between employees' professional and private lives. This article focuses on the question of under what conditions managers grant a subordinate's request to telework and what role national cultures play herein. By looking into managers' willingness to delegate power and to trust home-based teleworkers we try to explain the slow adoption of home-based telework and the reported differences across Northern and Southern European countries. In doing so we will make use of Hofstede's writings on national cultures and of the propositions made by the telework literature on how to mitigate the potential trust problem associated with distance working. The purpose of the article is to develop new hypotheses regarding factors that influence managerial decision-making concerning telework and how these interact with national cultures. To test the hypotheses, a cross-national vignette study is proposed.

KEY WORDS • control • Europe, national culture • home-based telework • human resource management • telework penetration rates • trust • work-family balance

Like flexible working hours and part-time work, home-based telework¹ is one of the reported arrangements organizations can introduce in order to allow their employees a better balance between professional and private life (Powell and Mainiero, 1999; den Dulk, 2001; Poelmans et al., 2003). Organi-

zations in turn, may expect to receive more organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and employee retention and attraction in return (see Bailey and Kurland, 2002). Telework may contribute to a better work-life balance in several ways. Telework is viewed as a time-saving strategy because it avoids

commuting time to the office (Peters et al., 2002). Although the results of empirical studies on telework are mixed, some indicate that teleworkers do have longer commutes than those who do not (Bailey and Kurland, 2002). In a study of 849 Dutch employees using a personal computer at the workplace, Peters et al. (forthcoming) found that employees who commute more than one hour to the office not only prefer home-based telework more than employees who have shorter one-way commuting times, but are also more likely to be allowed to work from home. The time saved by teleworking can be used for other activities, such as childcare or doing household chores. Employees involved in telework often report more control over their work schedule, in terms of when and where they work, but especially with respect to the order, way and speed of doing their work. This schedule flexibility, in turn, reduces employees' work-family conflict (Gottlieb et al., 1998). In line with this finding, employees preferring home-based telework were also found to be more supportive of the statement that 'telecommuting enables a flexible scheduling of the day' (Peters et al., forthcoming). Another reason for employees to prefer home-based telework is that it allows them freedom from work interruptions by co-workers, customers, or other factors (see Bailey and Kurland, 2002). Working from home is often said to improve productivity and allows workers to meet deadlines in time. Although this does not necessarily relate to work-family conflict, employees who combine professional life and family duties may also gain from the benefits of a teleworking day, i.e. long, uninterrupted, quiet periods of time in which work can be done. However, telework does not diminish the need for childcare. In addition, the question can be raised as to whether telework actually contributes to a better work-life balance. Some studies show that teleworkers often work longer hours when compared with employees in other work arrangements. Nevertheless,

telework often implies more control over work schedules which might positively affect the work-life balance of employees (Gottlieb et al., 1998). It is important to note, however, that telework is not always introduced with the intention of supporting the work-life balance of employees. Employers can introduce telework for different reasons, for instance, as a solution to problems of housing expanding staff, as a means of reducing overheads, or as a way of attracting valuable personnel.

Despite the fact that telework seems an attractive solution for the problems workers face in balancing work and family life, penetration rates have not increased as much as expected. Since its introduction in the 1970s and 1980s, the total number of European teleworkers had increased to around 9 million in 1999 (European Commission, 2000: 29). In order to support the introduction of formal telework arrangements across Europe, the European Commission successfully urged social partners at European level to sign a framework agreement on telework, imposing equal rights regarding social and working conditions for teleworkers and non-teleworkers (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; van Klaveren et al., forthcoming). At present, however, European countries differ greatly in their adoption of telework; especially the differences in actual penetration rates between Northern and Southern European countries are striking (European Commission, 2000; Gareis, 2002). Table 1 gives the latest figures on different types of telework in Europe and the US. A distinction is made between home-based telework, mobile teleworkers and self-employed teleworkers. In this article we focus primarily on home-based telework. That is, alternating home-based teleworkers who spend at least one working day at home; permanent home-based teleworkers who spend almost all their working time at home; and supplementary home-based teleworkers who work from home less than one day a week.

Table 1 Types of telework across Europe and the US, 2002 (in % of employed persons)

	All home-based teleworkers	Home-based teleworkers alternating/ permanent	Mobile workers	Self-employed teleworkers	All teleworkers (excluding overlaps)
Austria	6.7	2.0	3.7	5.7	13.8
Belgium	7.5	2.2	2.4	2.5	10.6
Denmark	17.7	2.6	2.7	2.9	21.5
Finland	15.7	4.7	6.2	3.2	21.8
France	4.4	2.2	2.1	0.8	6.3
Germany	7.9	1.6	5.7	5.2	16.6
Greece	6.0	2.1	3.5	3.4	11.1
Ireland	6.0	0.5	4.2	3.3	10.9
Italy	2.5	0.8	5.5	2.6	9.5
Luxembourg	3.3	0.9	1.5	1.8	5.6
Netherlands	20.6	9.0	4.1	5.0	26.4
Portugal	1.6	0.5	0.3	1.5	3.4
Spain	2.3	0.3	0.8	2.0	4.9
Sweden	14.9	5.3	4.9	2.0	18.7
United Kingdom	10.9	2.4	4.7	4.5	17.3
EU	7.4	2.1	4.0	3.4	13.0
Switzerland	11.4	4.2	7.6	2.2	16.8
United States	17.3	5.1	5.9	6.3	24.6

Source: SIBIS 2002, GPS (in Garcis, 2002)

Mobile workers are those people who work at least 10 hours per week away from home and from the main workplace.

Table 1 shows that in 2002, on average 13% of employed persons in the ten EU countries practised some form of telework, against 25% in the US, with leading countries in Europe being the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland. Southern European countries are lagging behind; the lowest percentage of teleworkers being found in Portugal. Furthermore, home-based telework appears to be the largest category among the different types of telework and is dominated by supplementary teleworkers; i.e. those working less than one full working day from home. This is true for all countries. Only Sweden, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands are characterized by a substantial percentage of

alternating and permanent home-based teleworkers (between 4% and 9%). Compared with the 1999 ECaTT data (European Commission, 2000), it also becomes evident that supplementary telework is growing faster than the other types of home-based telework. Hence, the development in home-based telework does not seem to result in 'workers spending more and more time working at home, but rather to more and more workers spending a fraction of their weekly working time at home' (Garcis, 2002: 12). This points towards a greater flexibility in the use of individual working locations – for instance, to balance work and private life in a more optimal way, and less towards some of the traditional advantages ascribed to telework – like savings on commuting time.

The cross-national variation in the actual

number of home-based teleworkers presented in Table 1 is mirrored in figures representing establishments' interest in telework (European Commission, 2000). Among businesses in 1999, interest in introducing telework (including supplementary and informal telework) was highest in Finland, Denmark and Sweden (almost 70% of all establishments) and lowest in Italy and Spain (25–30% of all establishments) (European Commission, 2000: 35). General interest among employees regarding home-based telework shows less variation across the countries. In the ECaTT 1999 study, most countries showed figures in the 60–70% range, with Sweden leading the field with almost 90% of the labour force already teleworking or interested in doing so (European Commission, 2000: 34). The SIBIS 2002 pilot showed that in 2002, on average, 67% of the EU workforce expressed interest in home-based or centre-based telework (Gareis, 2002: 6).

The studies quoted indicate that the interest among employees is larger than the interest among employers. But even when there is a telework scheme present in a company or firm, wide-scale adoption among employees is not guaranteed. According to most teleworking policies, it is the direct manager who, in the final analysis, decides which workers are allowed to telework. He or she is assumed to be able to judge best whose jobs are teleworkable, and which individuals are suited to telework. Telework practice, therefore, largely depends on individual managers' discretion. It is particularly the lack of support by direct managers that is believed to be a major bottleneck with respect to the growth of telework. Managers may fear, for instance, that employees will not meet their responsibilities when not monitored directly (Leeds and Leeds, 2002) and that telework schemes may make their own work more complicated (Powell and Mainiero, 1999). Huws et al. (1990), who surveyed 4000 European managers, found that many of them see no need for the adop-

tion of telework. Generally, studies examining reasons why adoption and diffusion of telework have been slow found interest among line managers to be low (Bailey and Kurland, 2002). In this article we argue that managerial reluctance towards home-based telework is reinforced by two related factors: managers' willingness to *deal with the uncertainty* that goes with distance working; and their willingness to *delegate power* to subordinates. Moreover, these two factors may be considered as barriers in some organizational and national contexts, but less so in others. The two factors mentioned correspond with two of Hofstede's dimensions of national culture. Most telework scholars focus on the organizational change or management practices deemed necessary to successfully introduce telework; less attention is given to the question as to whether these conditions are equally compatible in different national cultures or how to explain cross-national differences. The cross-national differences in telework penetration rates, however, closely correspond to Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures, indicating that the adaptation of home-based telework is affected by the cultural climate in a country. The aim of this article is to elaborate on the impact of national culture on the adoption of telework. The focus will be on factors influencing managerial decision-making regarding subordinates' requests for home-based telework and how these interact with national cultures. In doing so we will combine insights from the human resource management literature on telework (e.g. Daniels et al., 2000) with Hofstede's (2001) writings on national cultures. The central questions that are addressed are: under what conditions do managers grant subordinates' requests to work from home?; and what role do national cultures play herein? The outline of this article is as follows. In the next section, a theoretical model is presented of factors affecting managerial decision-making regarding employees' requests for home-based

telework within different national cultural settings. Four clusters of explanatory factors will be distinguished: country factors; organizational factors; employee characteristics; and characteristics of the employee's telework request. Although we do acknowledge that individual basic values of managers at various organizational levels will differ (see Suomi and Pekkola, 1999: 121–4) and subcultures within one country, within one organization and even within one business unit will vary (Cameron and Quinn: 1999), the main focus in the present study will be on cross-national differences in decision-making behaviour resulting from variations in national cultures (see Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, the basic values of individual managers will not be included in the model since we expect these to be strongly influenced by organizational and national cultures. The third section discusses the proposed methodology of the research project, i.e. a cross-national vignette study of managers in European organizations. Finally, our model and proposed methodology are summarized, and shortcomings are discussed, as well as options for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Managers' Attitudes towards Home-based Telework

Traditionally, managers and their subordinates worked in the same physical work site, according to a collective temporal work schedule. The centralized work arrangement allowed managers to coordinate, motivate and control employees' work effort directly. It also catered for the need for workers to accumulate firm-specific knowledge. An enduring employment relationship made sure that trusted workers had a shared history and, hence, shared the norms and values necessary to communicate, cooperate and carry out the work. Being in the normal workplace was equal to working, whereas

being absent was not (van der Wielen and Taillieu, 1994).

Because of the use of new information and communication technologies, the execution of work has increasingly become independent of time and space. Still, however, managers may have the compulsion of needing to be with their subordinates. While working from home, subordinates are out of sight and, as a consequence, direct monitoring of these employees becomes more complicated, if possible at all. Moreover, traditional time-spatial work patterns used to indicate the temporal borderlines within which managers were allowed to control subordinates. Through home-based telework the distinction between work and private life is blurred, which complicates managers' work even further (van der Wielen and Taillieu, 1994). Workers' time-spatial flexibility is likely to increase managers' uncertainty about the work being done correctly, because employees' possibilities of acting in an untrustworthy way have increased. Managers considering telework, therefore, have to make an assessment of the risks linked with distance working and the costs involved in order to reduce uncertainties (Williamson, 1985; Powell and Mainiero, 1999). Since managers are rewarded primarily for the results they achieve in their work units, rather than for the concern they demonstrate for their employees' work-life balance, it can be expected that telework requests that boil down to more managerial effort are less likely to be supported by individual managers (Powell and Mainiero, 1999; Williamson, 1985). The study by Huws et al. (1990) showed that concerns about coordinating telework schemes and controlling employees who work away from the office make managers reluctant to introduce home-based telework.

Theoretically, managers who do allow subordinates to telework may respond to the uncertainty problem in two ways. One way of solving uncertainty problems is to think of

alternative modes to coordinate, motivate and control teleworkers. For instance, managers can call these workers at home in order to check whether they are working and what they have accomplished. This, of course, is time-consuming and, therefore, very costly, and still does not guarantee that workers are not underperforming. A second strategy is to shift to trusting teleworkers instead of controlling them directly. According to the telework literature, this second strategy is most often chosen and, consequently, most telework arrangements are high-trust work forms (Handy, 1995; Huws et al., 1990; Leeds and Leeds, 2002; Standen, 2000).

Teleworkers may not only be given a greater say in their time-spatial work conditions, but also more decision-making authority and responsibility for control and enhancement of product and/or service quality. This relates to the concept of empowerment (see Klidas, 2001: 38). Historically, however, there is a link between views on time and space and beliefs on industrial discipline and status hierarchy. Distance working and self-control used to go together with more authority, prestige and status and, therefore, were traditionally inappropriate for subordinates (van der Wielen and Taillieu, 1994). Moreover, the enhancement of employees' autonomy or self-control may require fewer management functions. An added reason for managerial reluctance, therefore, will be that managers may also fear a loss of relevance regarding their own position (Betz et al., 1999: 36). Hence, in order to allow home-based telework, managers have to be willing to give up power and status (Harrington and Ruppel, 1999).

Given the cross-national differences in the adoption of telework it might be the case that in some countries managers are more inclined to deal with uncertainty and to delegate power than they are in other countries. Klidas (2001, 2002) investigated the implementation of employee empowerment in the European hotel industry. Employee

empowerment involves the delegation of decision-making authority to frontline employees and is, therefore, a management concept that is much related to the telework practice. In his study of luxury hotels in seven European countries, he found clear differences in the empowerment process between hotels in Northern and Southern European countries. Northern European countries showed more empowering HRM practices and empowered behaviour than Southern countries. These differences corresponded strongly with Hofstede's theory of national culture, in particular to the power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions. These will be elaborated on next.

Power distance and uncertainty avoidance are two of the five dimensions on which national cultures differ according to Hofstede (2001). These two dimensions are considered to be crucial for the functioning of organizations. The concept of power distance refers to the boss-subordinate relationship in a hierarchy; i.e. who decides what. Large power distance implies high centralization of power among few people and many layers of supervision in vertical hierarchies, while small power distance implies more decentralized organizations with flat organizational structures and few layers of supervision. According to Hofstede, people in large power distance cultures prefer to be managed in a directive style, while those in low power distance cultures more often prefer a participative style. Moreover, in large power distance countries people feel more comfortable with an autocratic leadership style, while those in low power distance countries expect to be rewarded for showing initiative and autonomy in their work. Since home-based telework often implies more control by the employee over work schedules, telework might be more feasible in low power distance cultures.

Uncertainty avoidance is about how people deal with the unknown. In strong uncertainty avoidance countries, individuals

feel more threatened by uncertain and unknown situations. Therefore, the existence of many formal and informal laws and rules controlling the work process may satisfy an emotional need of people for structure and order. Employees and managers in such cultures feel comfortable in structured environments that attempt to prevent uncertainty and ambiguity in their behaviour. 'Uncertainty-avoiding cultures shun ambiguous situations. People in such cultures look for structure in their organizations, institutions and relationships, which makes events clearly interpretable and predictable' (Hofstede, 2001: 148). As was stated before, managers have to deal with a certain degree of uncertainty when they introduce teleworking, because direct control of workers becomes more complicated. Moreover, when telework is introduced without an appropriate management style and clear rules, this may lead to ambiguous situations; for example feelings of uncertainty about, for instance, appropriate situations for working from home. This may in particular apply to informal, supplementary home-based telework. In weak uncertainty cultures, on the other hand, there is an emotional aversion to formal rules, which favours low formalization with no more rules than strictly necessary. Hence, the telework concept does not fit strong uncertainty avoiding cultures. If telework is to be adopted, however, it can be assumed that structured, formal teleworking is more suitable for strong uncertainty avoiding cultures, while informal, flexible telework arrangements are more suitable for cultures in the opposite pole.

Based on the two dimensions, three cultural clusters can be distinguished in the European context (see Figure 1): Nordic countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, the UK and Switzerland, are in general characterized by a small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance. Southern European countries fall in the cluster of large power distance and strong

uncertainty avoidance, although there is some variation in the scoring range. Austria and (West) Germany are characterized by a small power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance.

The clustering of countries according to Hofstede's two dimensions presented in Figure 1, closely resembles SIBIS figures on the actual penetration of home-based telework across countries in 2002 as presented in Table 1. Leading countries regarding home-based telework, such as the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, score low on both power distance and uncertainty avoidance dimensions. Countries where home-based telework is less widespread score higher on those two dimensions. Austria and Germany are in the middle.

The argument that strong uncertainty avoiding countries will prefer formalized telework arrangements is not reflected in the telework figures (Table 1). Also in Southern European countries, supplementary teleworking outnumbers formal home-based telework arrangements, although differences between the two forms are smaller than in leading countries. Even though penetration rates for teleworking more or less correspond to the clustering of countries according to the two cultural dimensions, the relative influence of national culture on the take-up of telework still needs to be tested.

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Let us now imagine an employee in a particular European country submitting a request for home-based telework. In Figure 2 a conceptual model is presented of factors affecting managerial decision-making regarding such a request. On the basis of the telework literature and Hofstede's theory on national cultures, it can be assumed that managers who are in the position to grant an individual's telework request will make an assessment of the congruence of the telework practice a particular worker requests with existing systems

<i>Small power distance</i> <i>Weak uncertainty avoidance</i> Denmark Sweden Ireland UK Norway The Netherlands Finland Switzerland	<i>Large power distance</i> <i>Weak uncertainty avoidance</i>
<i>Small power distance</i> <i>Strong uncertainty avoidance</i> Germany (West) Austria	<i>Large power distance</i> <i>Strong uncertainty avoidance</i> Italy France Belgium Turkey Spain Portugal Greece

Source: Hofstede (2001).

Figure 1 Clusters of European countries according to scores on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (i.e., power distance and uncertainty avoidance)

and cultures (see Daniels et al., 2000: 5). We assume that managers' attitudes towards teleworking are affected by the national culture and the organizational context they work in, as well as the characteristics of the employee requesting telework and the content of the request. We also assume that managers who are working in an organizational context that is more supportive of telework, will be more willing to grant a telework request. In Figure 2, the arrows representing direct effects of supportive organizational factors on managerial decision-making depict this assumption. The presence of supportive contextual factors depends, however, on the national context, in particular on the country scores on Hofstede's dimensions regarding power distance and uncertainty avoidance. These

two dimensions are believed to influence managers' willingness to trust subordinates and to delegate power, respectively. In Figure 2, this assumption is depicted by arrows representing direct effects of national culture on supportive organizational factors. But even when supportive conditions are present, we assume managers' judgements to be affected by their national cultures. In Figure 2, this is made visible by arrows representing interaction effects between organizations' supportive conditions and national culture.

Besides trust in organizational support, we also believe that managers need to have personal trust in the individual employee and to be willing to delegate power (see Leeds and Leeds, 2002). Therefore, granting the telework request will also depend on characteris-

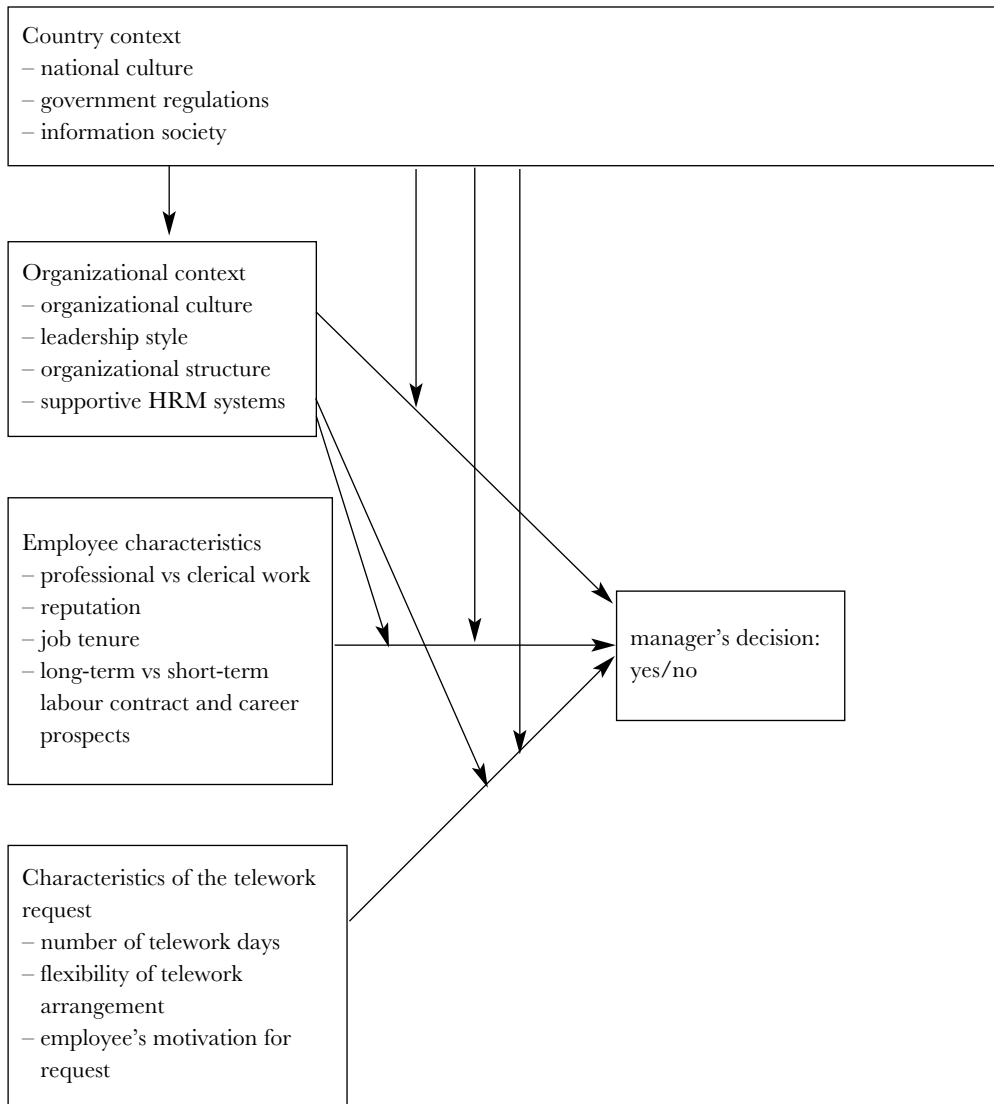


Figure 2 Conceptual model of management decision-making on employees' requests for home-based telework

tics of the individual employee and on the content of the individual's telework request. The relative weights of the characteristics of the employee and the request depend also on supportive conditions in the organizations. Again, interactions with Hofstede's two cultural dimensions can be expected. These relationships are also depicted in Figure 2.

In the following, we look further into the hypotheses underlying the relationships presented in Figure 2. First, we develop hypotheses on the influence of the organizational context based on insights from the telework literature and the interaction with national culture. Second, we have a closer look at selection criteria managers may use

regarding individual teleworkers. Third, we develop hypotheses regarding the content of the individual telework request. Again, the national cultural background will be taken into account. Since the focus is on national culture, some other important national characteristics – such as the information society and the role of government, industrial relations and trade unions (Tregaskis, 2000) – will not be discussed. Note that in all hypotheses, national cultures characterized by strong uncertainty avoidance and large power distance will be regarded as the reference group. Moreover, all hypotheses include the *ceteris paribus* condition; that is, all other factors in the model are kept constant.

Organizational context It was stated earlier that managers might respond to uncertainty problems regarding telework in two ways. In order to manage at a distance, they may either think of using alternative modes of control or they may decide to trust teleworkers. Of course, a combination of the two can also be chosen. The amount of trust individual managers might be willing to give to subordinates will be conditioned by characteristics of both the organizational context and the individual employee submitting a telework request (see Leeds and Leeds, 2002). We will now discuss organizational conditions that are believed to be favourable for telework and, consequently, enhance managerial trust. In their publication *Managing Telework* Daniels et al. (2000) bring together a series of writings on telework management issues. Their main starting point is the assumption that managing teleworkers, *as a human process*, demands (a shift towards) a particular organizational culture, structure, leadership style and supporting management systems, which are necessary to reduce managers' uncertainty and to empower teleworkers at the same time. In the following, we look further into what organizational features are believed to be favourable for telework.

Organizational culture: Standen (2000) describes the influence of organizations' cultural assumptions regarding management and work on the adoption of telework. In his opinion, strong norms about being seen to be working make some organizations less amenable to telework than others (Standen, 2000: 31). Also norms such as the need for employees to participate in the organizational culture; work to be confined to business hours; workers to convey a corporate image; and work processes to be interruptible, may keep managers from allowing subordinates to telework (Standen, 2000: 32). In empirical research, Standen found a *lack* of emphasis on control (including coordination, rules, formality, stability and predictability) to be the most important single factor positively relating to actual telework practices. This was followed by a focus on productivity and accomplishment. To a lesser extent, cultural characteristics such as having a favourable attitude towards innovation via technology; making employees feel part of the organization; and creativity and innovation were found also to be positively correlated with telework (Standen, 2000: 37–8).

H1: Managers are more likely to grant a telework request when the organizational culture does not emphasize face-to-face contact or direct control.

Leadership style and organizational structure: It is also believed that an approach to management that gives workers greater discretion over the work process; focuses on outcomes; and offers more holistic jobs will be better suited to telework than one based on hierarchy and fragmentation (Standen, 2000: 32, 33). Especially substantial telework practices within an organization may, therefore, require a re-engineering of work processes and project-based structures by introducing new task specification and coordination systems with improved and much more open communication; a reallocation of power; job enrichment; and a team- and goal-orientated work style (Management by Objectives). This

leadership style is likely to coincide with outsourcing, downsizing and flattening hierarchies (Daniels et al., 2000: 5; Betz et al., 1999: 16; Lamond, 2000: 22).

H2: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when a democratic and participative leadership style is advocated in the organization.

H3: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request in less hierarchical organizations than in organizations with many hierarchical layers.

Information and communication systems: According to Standen (2000), the central value of control also influences the way technology is used. On the one hand, computer technology may provide the opportunity for very precise monitoring of activity in some jobs (telephone call centres) (Standen, 2000: 33). On the other hand, IT can be used to enhance delegation of authority, by making information easily available to employees and allowing rapid decisions. IT systems allowing for open communication among teleworkers and co-workers, between teleworkers and managers and between teleworkers and clients are, therefore, believed to be essential.

H4: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when the organization has an open information and communication system and technical facilities that support telework.

Supportive HRM systems: Given the relative loss of direct control over teleworkers, mutual trust and confidence between managers and employees are generally believed to be increasingly important. Alternative management systems, however, may support managers to control teleworkers indirectly. These systems may focus on HRM practices such as selection and training of teleworkers (input control); socializing teleworkers to control themselves (self-control); planning, measuring and rewarding performances (output control); and mutual control exercised by team workers or clients (see Adami, 1999; Depickere, 1999; Sparrow, 2000; Sparrow

and Daniels, 1999; van Ommeren, 2000). Of course, in order to provide some form of reinforcement, different forms of control may be used in conjunction (see Hales, 1993: 56–7).

H5: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when supportive HRM practices are present in the organization.

To summarize, in order to reduce managers' uncertainty and to empower teleworkers at the same time, managing telework is believed to demand (a shift towards) an organizational culture focusing less on processes and control and more on output; an empowering leadership style; a flatter organizational structure; and supportive HRM systems. Combining these criteria, we assume that (see Figure 2):

H6: Managers working in organizations that are characterized by these supportive conditions are more likely to grant an employee's telework request.

We have argued, however, that these supportive conditions also fit more into national cultures characterized by weak uncertainty avoidance and small power distance (Klidas, 2001, 2002). Therefore, we assume that (see Figure 2):

H7: Organizational conditions favourable for telework are more likely to be present in national cultures characterized by weak uncertainty avoidance and small power distance, respectively.

In conclusion, given differences in national cultures regarding trusting teleworkers and delegating power, we assume that (see Figure 2):

H8: When supportive organizational conditions are not present, managers in organizations characterized by weak uncertainty avoidance and low power distance cultures, respectively, are more likely to grant an employee's telework request.

Employee characteristics Managers may consider jobs to be teleworkable when little

need for direct supervision and face-to-face interaction is required (Omari and Standen, 2000). Consequently, both knowledge-intensive workers with a high degree of autonomy and workers relying less on formal knowledge but whose output can be measured are likely to have access to telework. However, status and power are believed to interfere with assessments of who can telework. Several studies indicate that clerical workers in comparison with professionals may face greater opposition from management to their request to work from home, even when their positions are deemed equally suitable for telework based on an assessment of general job characteristics (Bailey and Kurkland, 2002: 386). In addition, the employee's reputation for trustworthiness, and capacities and capabilities in the internal and external labour market are important in relation to the willingness of the manager to trust the employee:

H9: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when the employee has a large amount of job autonomy.

H10: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when the employee has high status.

Knowledge of the organization and a good relationship with co-workers and managers are considered important. Employees who have worked in the organization for a long time are assumed to be familiar with the organizational norms and values and to know what is expected of them. Therefore, job tenure is believed to be an important factor in the selection of teleworkers, as well as reputation:

H11: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when the employee has a good reputation.

H12: A manager is more likely to grant the telework request of a employee who has been employed with the company for a long period of time than those of employees recently employed by the organization.

In addition, employees who expect to stay longer with the organization, or who are offered promotion prospects, are expected to be more trustworthy than other employees because they do not want to run the risk of losing their position by acting in an untrustworthy manner. In short-term relationships, commitment may be low (Sparrow, 2000; van Ommeren, 2000: 153–4).

H13: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request to employees with a long-term contract and career prospects than to employees with a short-term labour contract and no career prospects

Combining these criteria with Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the organizational context, we assume that (see Figure 2): managers will be more inclined to grant a telework request from subordinates who hold positions of power (professionals); and subordinates with a good reputation, positive past experiences and future expectations (job tenure and career prospects) within the organization.

H14: Even when favourable employee characteristics are not present, however, a telework request is more likely to be granted in a supportive organizational context.

H15: Even when favourable employee characteristics are not present, however, a telework request is more likely to be granted in weak uncertainty avoidance and small power distance cultures.

Content of the telework request The content of a subordinate's telework request may also affect managers' decision-making. First, teleworking complicates managers' possibilities of controlling subordinates directly. This problem will be mitigated if the number of teleworking days is reduced.

H16: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request of less than one day a week compared with a request for one day or more a week.

Second, Powell and Maneiro (1999) pointed out that managers object to a request for a

flexible work arrangement when their work, as a result, will become more demanding. In cases where managers can control the time-spatial work schedules of teleworkers, however, they may be less reluctant.

H17: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when she or he is able to demand the employee to be present on a particular day.

Third, the reason offered by the subordinate for making the request can also be of importance. As was stated in the first section, employees may want to work from home for different reasons: to reduce commuting time, to concentrate on work without interruptions, or to adjust their working times to fit in with caring responsibilities at home. Since telework practices of subordinates whose motives are more intrinsically related to work appear to be more successful, managers may trust the teleworker more when the motivation to work from home is work-related, such as achieving greater concentration, rather than when the motives refer to reducing commuting time, or to care responsibilities or work-life balance (see Omari and Standen, 2000). Moreover, managers may think that women employees are more likely to use telework to balance work and family life, while men are seen as the major breadwinner and more devoted to their careers. As a result male employees might be considered as more trustworthy when working from home.

H18: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request when the reason to work from home is work-related.

H19: A manager is more likely to grant a telework request from a male employee than from a female employee.

Summarizing these factors and combining them with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, we assume that (see Figure 2) managers will be more inclined to grant telework requests that boil down to smaller numbers of teleworking days; that allow managers to control subordinates' time-spatial work schedules; and that are motivated by work-

related goals such as achieving greater work concentration, rather than goals such as balancing work and care or saving commuting time.

H20: Even when the content of the telework request is not favourable, however, managers in a supportive organizational context are more likely to grant the request.

H21: Even when the content of the telework request is not favourable, however, managers in weak uncertainty avoidance and small power distance cultures are more likely to grant the request.

Methodology

A way to test our hypotheses is to conduct a vignette study among European managers, asking them to judge hypothetical situations concerning a telework request. Some of the variables in our model can be included in the vignette, such as characteristics of the employee submitting the request, and variables representing the content of the request. Other topics, such as organizational characteristics, can be addressed in an additional questionnaire. A vignette study set up like this makes it possible to estimate the relative importance of different contexts, i.e. the national context, the organizational context, departmental characteristics, manager's characteristics, employee characteristics and the content of the request. Multilevel analysis would be an appropriate technique to test the various hypotheses since this recognizes the empirical reality that managers' decisions are 'nested' in the context of the country, the organization and the department. This enables us to estimate the importance of different decision-making contexts simultaneously, and to compare their explanatory power.

We will include the following variables in the vignettes:

- The employee's reputation: outstanding past performances (1); and no outstanding past performances (2);

- Employee's job tenure: less than two years employed (1); over two years employed (2);
- The type of telecommuting arrangement requested by the employee: to occasionally work a day from home (1); regularly working from home on one fixed day a week (2) working regularly more than one day per week from home (3);
- Employee's reason to telework: telework is requested by the employee in order to collect children from school/childcare facility (1); to concentrate better on work (2); to save commuting time (3);
- Employee's gender: male (1); female (2).

By including these variables in the vignettes, we have a total of 72 'unique' vignettes ($2 \times 2 \times 3 \times 3 \times 2$). We will ask each manager to judge each situation on how favourable they feel towards the hypothetical request, and whether they would deny or grant the request, as if the concerned employee was someone working in his or her department. Because we want to make the decision-making process as 'real' as possible, we will then match variables concerning the characteristics of the manager, his or her department, his or her organizational context, and his or her organizational context to the vignettes.

The additional questionnaire will contain the following measurements of the organization's and the manager's characteristics:

- organizational culture;
- leadership style;
- organizational structure;
- information and communication systems;
- supportive HRM systems;
- Hofstede's scale capturing the dimensions of national culture; i.e. power distance and uncertainty avoidance;
- department characteristics, such as number of employees, most common job position, average educational level of

employees, job autonomy, number of teleworkers;

- personal characteristics of the manager, such as gender, educational level, work-family situation (control variables).

In total, 10 service sector companies with a telework policy across five countries will be approached for the vignette study. By selecting companies with a telework policy in a particular industry, some factors are held constant, such as accessibility of IT. The research focuses on what happens after a company has decided to introduce a telework policy. From the Northern European countries we study the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In the Southern part of Europe, Italy and Spain will be taken as examples. Per country, two organizations will take part in the study; per organization 10 managers will be asked to participate. Budget and time restrictions put limits on the number of organizations and countries included. However, to fully determine the relative influence of the organizational as well as the country context on managerial decision-making a larger number of organizations and countries should be included. A solution for (part of) this problem is the inclusion of the measurement of Hofstede's dimensions in the manager's questionnaire.

In order to test our hypotheses we will use a sufficient number of vignettes that will be presented to managers who also in their daily work practice face the decision-making problem regarding telework. Because we want the decisions to resemble 'real life' as closely as possible, it is important that we ask the manager who actually has the power to grant or deny these requests to make the hypothetical decisions. It is also important that we do not give the managers too many vignettes, since this would influence the reliability of their decisions as a proxy for 'real-life' decisions. Each manager will be asked to judge 12 vignettes, which will result in 1200 'hypothetical decisions'. Because we have a total of 72

'unique' vignettes, each of these will be judged by an average of 16.7 (1200/72) managers.

Discussion

The theoretical elaboration presented in this article showed managers' decision-making regarding subordinates' requests for home-based telework to be influenced by conditions related to the country context, organizational context, employee characteristics, and content of the individual request. Although we do acknowledge the impact of other national factors, such as government policies and the information society, the focus was on the role of national cultures. Two dimensions of national culture were distinguished, i.e. power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). Scores on these two cultural dimensions appeared to correlate with telework penetration rates across European countries. Therefore, we assumed that the conditions under which managers grant subordinates' requests to work from home may vary across national cultures and, hence, across countries. This assumption was the basis of a theoretical model on managerial decision-making regarding home-based telework. The model, on the one hand, summarized assumptions regarding favourable conditions for telework as suggested in the telework management literature. On the other hand, these conditions were expected to interact with national culture.

We believe that testing our theoretical model will contribute to our knowledge on managerial decision-making regarding home-based telework in general, and will provide new insights into and theoretical explanations for the various patterns of telework penetration across Europe, in particular. Among other factors, it may shed light on variations in European managers' perceptions of home-based telework as a flexible work arrangement that helps to balance work and family. Telework often grants employees more control over their work schedules,

which in turn helps to reduce work-family conflict. By looking at conditions that make managers more willingly to delegate power and control to employees, we will gain new insights into whether employees are likely to get more control over their work schedule in different countries. The study may also show whether telework is likely to be seen as a legitimate strategy to find a more optimal work-life balance, or whether managers view employees who do teleworking as less trustworthy. In addition, findings from this study can be used in future research on the utilization of other work-family policies, such as flexible working times and leave arrangements. This is a first attempt to systematically study cross-nationally factors that influence managerial decision-making concerning the implementation of a flexible work arrangement. When successful, future research may apply the research design to other work-family policies. Future research should also elaborate on the perspective of employees and whether the implementation and utilization of telework indeed contribute to a better work-life balance.

Note

- 1 Telework is a generic term referring to work located at a distance from a regular main office site, often performed with the help of information and communication technology (IT) (see Nilles, 1998). In some definitions the new work mode is narrowed to distance working for more than one full day per week or 20% of employees' contractual work hours. A broader definition of telework comprises all home-based telework, mobile telework, telework by self-employed, supplementary telework, telework in telework centres/telecottages, and combinations of different kinds of telework (for data and definitions see European Commission, 2000: 26, 29).

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Résumé

Une comparaison des différences d'appui aux managers travaillant à domicile : une construction théorique (Pascale Peters et Laura den Dulk)

Le télétravail à la maison est l'une des réponses introduites par les organisations pour faciliter un meilleur équilibre entre les vies professionnelles et privées de leurs employés. Cet article se concentre sur la question de l'accord des managers avec les demandes de télétravail des subordonnés, et sur le rôle des cultures nationales dans ce domaine. En étudiant la volonté des managers de déléguer du pouvoir et de faire confiance aux télétravailleurs à domicile, nous tentons d'expliquer la lente adoption du télétravail à domicile et les différences en la matière entre l'Europe du nord et l'Europe du sud. Nous utilisons les approches de Hofstede sur les cultures nationales et les apports de la littérature sur le télétravail quant à la diminution des problèmes potentiels de confiance associés au travail à distance. Le but de cet article est de développer de nouvelles hypothèses sur les facteurs qui influencent les décisions managériales dans le domaine du télétravail et sur les liens qu'entretiennent ces facteurs avec les cultures nationales. Nous proposons de développer une étude empirique comparative s'appuyant sur la méthodologie des vignettes.

摘要

經理人員支持家庭式電子化工作方式的跨文化不同：理論詳解

Pascale Peters and Laura den Dulk

家庭式電子化的工作方式是企業為更好地協調僱員的專業工作和家庭生活之間關係而採用的一種方式。本文的研究重點是關於在什麼條件下經理允許下屬採用電子化的工作方式，以及文化因素在其中的影響。在研究了經理人員下放權力的意向和對家庭式電子化工作方式信任程度的基礎上，文章作者試圖解釋被慢慢採用的家庭式電子化工作方式以及南北歐國家之間存在的不同。針對這一研究目的，文章作者採用HOFSTEDE的國家文化理論以及一些關於建議如何協調遠距離工作中潛在信任問題的理論文獻。本項研究的目的是在於發展出新的有關影響管理層關於電子化工作方式的決策因素以及這些因素同國家文化之間關係的假設。為了驗證這些假設，研究被設定為跨國際的研究課題。